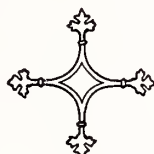


# Engineers Versus Poets

By SAMUEL GUY INMAN



Committee on Cooperation in Latin America

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**I**N MATTERS of public order, public health, public schools and economic development our Latin American neighbors are far behind our own standards. But the sudden jar which we in the United States are at present receiving with reference to the perfection of our machine civilization makes us more willing to see some of the advantages in Latin America which heretofore have largely been considered as faults. It is not a question of condemning one or the other of these American civilizations but a question of keeping balanced, that neither one allow itself to develop to the extreme its special emphasis on life. It has been said that the difference between the North American and Latin American is that one is practical and the other idealistic, but if the definition of these two words means that one is always selfishly looking for aggrandizement and the other is always unselfishly living for the spiritual that statement is certainly not correct. We do find undoubtedly that these two peoples have different philosophies of life, one of which produces the engineer and the other the poet. Here is the eternal struggle between the practical man and the dreamer, the sociologist and the mystic, Luther and Loyola, Sancho Panza and Don Quixote.

After all, Cervantes' classic probably gives us a better picture of these two ideals and the values of each than anything else we have as a basis for studying these fundamentally different approaches to life. Many people regard Cervantes' classic as written for the purpose of amusement and the destruction of the old worship of knighthood; but that is to misunderstand this remarkable work. Don Quixote with all of his foolish attacks on the windmills represents the best of His-

panic life. Unamuno, who has written the greatest commentary on Don Quixote, which fortunately has been translated recently into English, says that his people will never recover their manliness of yore until they play the Quixote without compromise.

It is precisely the struggle to recover that spirit which makes the recent Spanish revolution an important event in world history. Spain after having turned from the philosophy of Don Quixote, which is fundamentally her own, and endeavored to adopt the more modern attitude of Sancho Panza, now returns to Don Quixote. It was not without deep significance for the world that April 20, 1931, marks both the declaration of the Spanish Republic and an important milestone in the triumph of Gandhi's non-resistance program. However, one might disagree with certain details, there is an indescribable inspiration in thinking of the triumph of the spiritual through those two remarkable men, Gandhi and Unamuno. Just as Gandhi has fought his battle for right through many years of spiritual sacrifice so Unamuno, unquestionably one of the great souls of Europe, fought his fight. He never failed to declare his faith in God and his opposition to the King and when he was driven out of Spain into exile he lived the life of an ascetic, waiting for the time when a new day should come. Our friend, Dr. John Mackay, tells us of a visit to Unamuno while he was in exile. A Spanish sculptor was making a bust of the great prophet and as he had about concluded it in the soft plaster Unamuno went up to the figure and made a cross over the heart. It was his way of expressing the doctrine of the cross, the need of sacrifice which is necessary in the life not only of

Christ but of everyone of his followers.

To those who know and appreciate this marvelous spirit of Unamuno, this ideal of Don Quixote, which moves in spite of its sins and shortcomings, the prediction of Count Keyserling in his book on Europe three years ago does not seem foolish when he says: "I prophesy that an Iberian period will follow the North American one which we are witnessing. All that is most important for the future of humanity is to be expected from Spanish America, which is ripening, and from Spain which is arising. Such a cultural cycle is endowed with all the qualities necessary to supplement or overpower the onesidedness of North America, leaning, as she does, towards the mechanical and technical."

Another modern writer of our own land, Stuart Chase, has recently brought back from Mexico a profound conviction that we have much to learn from those earliest Americans. Those of you who have read his charming book on Mexico will remember the searching questions which he raises as he compares the two civilizations as represented by two typical towns, Middletown and Tepoztlan. Accurate surveys have recently been made of both of these, one a great driving manufacturing city of Indiana and the other an indolent Indian town in Mexico. One is filled not only with factories and railroad yards but also with hospitals, schools and libraries; the other has none of these. As far as our modern civilization is concerned it is a complete failure and yet no one can go into these charming old villages in Mexico, with their social philosophy of life based on quiet meditation, poetry and neighborliness, and not feel that we moderns have something to learn here.

How can we Americans of the North and South help each other in these days of stress when every fundamental question of life must be re-faced? We of the North believe in the engineer; Mr. Hoover, Mr. Ford and Mr. Edison are our most honored citizens. From our

standpoint the greatest event in Pan-American relations during the last quarter of a century was the opening of the Panama Canal. With the Latin Americans the greatest event in inter-American relations in that period was probably the death of Amado Nervo. Who was Amado Nervo? No one, so far as most North Americans are concerned, but even for more ignorant Latin Americans he is the beloved poet who showed the mystic greatness of the soul. When he died, while attending the Congress on Child Welfare in Montevideo in 1918, the whole Hispanic world bowed its head in tribute while battleships of South American nations formed a funeral procession through the Southern Atlantic bearing his body for interment back to Mexico. He was the poet of the quiet life, the dreamer, the sufferer, whose philosophy was expressed in these beautiful verses:

#### DEITY

*As in the pebble sleeps the fiery spark,  
The statue in the clay, inert and dark,  
So slumbers the divine, O soul! in thee;  
But underneath the stroke of pain alone,  
Smiting and smiting, from the lifeless stone  
Leaps forth the lighting flash of deity.*

*Do not complain, then, of thy destiny,  
Since what there is of the divine in thee  
Only through it can rise into the light.  
Bear, if thou hast the courage, with a smile  
The life that the great Artist all the while  
Is carving, with his chisel-strokes of might.*

*What matter hours that teem with grievous  
things,  
If every hour unto thy budding wings  
Adds one more feather beautiful and free?  
Thou yet shalt see the condor high in air,  
Thou yet shalt see the finished sculpture fair;  
Thou yet shalt see, O spirit, thou shalt see!*

In religion, for example, the Latin emphasizes most the element of sacrifice and suffering, the Anglo-Saxon emphasizes the element of service. The Latin speaks much of life in the next world, the Anglo-Saxon emphasizes religion as a practical help in the present life. Not long ago one of our distinguished scientists, Robert Millikan, in an article in one of our mag-

azines emphasized his belief that religion is in essence an observance of the Golden Rule. This article was republished in Latin America and a number of writers, especially Navarro Monzó, attacked this idea as fundamentally wrong and as explaining the weakness of religion as presented by North Americans. Religion, said Monzó, is a matter of belief in God who cannot be defined nor understood. It necessarily involves the mystical elements and to reduce it to a kind of a moral or sociological formula defining how people ought to treat each other in this life, eliminates the most important most enduring in religion. What Jesus tried to teach His disciples was not a conviction that the best results in life are secured by reciprocal good treatment, but a sentiment of the dependence of the soul on God.

If I have emphasized the cultural life of Latin America with its emphasis in turn upon the poetic and philosophical, that is because, in the first place, the Latin American culture offers us in the United States some suggestions about our own readjustments, and secondly, because a knowledge of that culture is fundamental in any Christian program that we may undertake in Latin America. It is fundamental, because it gives us the necessary deep respect for the great past of Latin American and prevents our assuming a patronizing attitude, which is always fatal to right results. It is fundamental also, in order that Christian forces may not follow the fatal example of North American business and the United States Government in endeavoring to force too rapidly our program of efficiency, order and mass production.

During the last few years following the World War the practical North American business man and banker has taken upon himself the work of giving to Latin America the advantages of our modern machine age. Something like two billion dollars have been loaned to Latin America, supposedly for the purpose of building roads, paving streets, erecting public buildings and in other ways mod-

ernizing these Latin American countries. Such loans have always been opposed by a considerable group of the people but Latin American governments have been seized by a new kind of dictator, who has believed in the new machine age. He has combined with the North American business interests, and often the United States Government, to float large loans and to impose rapidly this modern civilization. This policy has had fatal results. To-day almost all the Latin American countries are poorer than they have been for a long time because they are compelled to pay such immense interest charges to their foreign bankers. In a number of these countries these amounts have been larger than their own national expenditures. Revolutions like those in Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Santo Domingo and Cuba have fundamentally as their basis this uprising against a too rapid forcing of modern methods of efficiency on Latin American countries.

But we have evidently come to the close of an era. In 1905 President Roosevelt declared that we would have to exercise police power over any countries in America that did not keep order and pay their debts and the United States Government officials began to suggest that New York bankers make loans to Santo Domingo and other governments, for the purpose of speeding up these processes toward order and financial supervision. Now President Hoover has announced the withdrawal of the marines from Haiti and Nicaragua, the only two Latin American countries where they are now quartered. And the American bankers are refusing practically any loans to Latin American governments. This is in contrast to a few years ago when, as Mr. Thomas Lamont expressed it, American bankers were sitting on the front steps of every capital in South America trying to negotiate loans with the government. They have now come to the painful realization that high pressure salesmanship went too far and that the consequences are now being suffered both by the in-



vestors in the United States and by the people in Latin America, who had their resources embargoed by these unwise extravagances of selfish dictators. Such loans have, therefore, been practically stopped at least for the present.

These countries are now facing not only the general world depression but larger charges for foreign debts than are the countries of Europe who must pay their war debts. Currency is everywhere depreciated and the deflation is going on at an immense pace. We think we have suffering in this country because of unemployment but the dire poverty found in nations like Peru, Chile and Colombia are beyond anything that we know. These countries face a tremendous struggle in the years to come with little but poverty to be expected. As a Chilean student has recently said, following the downfall of Dictator Ibanez in Chile, when the country was horrified to find that it was owing foreign bankers something like five hundred million dollars,

"Now is the time to reconstruct, to clean our house and our souls; to pay our bills—how much? Three to five hundred millions. So forward, with much work and little to eat. Sancho has shown us how he governs his island; now let us live by ideals, the work of Quixote."

Christian people in the United States have larger opportunities than ever to help bring faith and courage to the youthful liberal elements in Latin America, who are determined to lead their countries into a new life. The students have been responsible for practically every one of the revolts that have overthrown the dictators during the last two years. They are studying carefully the Russian experiment, but the Communist movement is very slight. A great deal of what is called communism there is simply an enlightened social attitude which the younger and more radical elements see as necessary to solve their problems.

The elderly statesmen there are still discussing the problem from the political standpoint, believing that this or that re-

form of the Constitution, the changing of election laws, and so on, would be a panacea for their ills. There is a group of young men and women, however, in all these countries that are seeing clearly that the old political reforms will get them nowhere in the solution of their problems. A new organization in Peru, called the *Apra*, composed of the students, of young men in the labor group and of young women who are going into business and professional life, is urging a fundamental reorganization of the nation's life.

A similar group in Colombia took an active part in the election of the new liberal President, Dr. Olaya Herrera. This group is now working for the reorganization of the educational system of Colombia, and also for a closer union among the countries that formerly made up Greater Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, Ecuador and the present Colombia. This group hopes that with such a regional unity in Northern South America, other regions in Latin America would unite, finally forming a loosely confederated Latin American union.

The new popular progressive President of Panama, Dr. Ricardo Alfaro, was called to his position through a revolution by a like-minded group of young men. Such groups are radical, quite often impractical, but they are compelling all of their countrymen to face squarely as never before the problems of the land, of labor, of the church and of the foreign investor.

The time is ripe for the best elements in the United States to make themselves known to these new socially minded groups in Latin America, who know usually only two classes of North Americans, governmental agents and business men. Christian workers should now function particularly along lines which will give a spiritual message to the community at large. Present-day conditions make opportunities now much greater outside of the churches than ever before. I was simply overwhelmed on my recent visit to Colombia, Panama and Peru at the num-

ber of invitations I received to address all kinds of groups who were facing all kinds of problems.

The next twenty-five years are going to be the most important that Latin America has ever known. There is now a freedom of choice such as was never before enjoyed. Both Europe and North America are thoroughly enough engrossed in their own problems and Latin America is strong enough in her own right to make unlikely the continuance of such an enormous effort to superimpose machine ideas and cultural ideas from outside. It is one of the few parts of the world where the intellectual classes are thoroughly familiar with European and North American cultural, governmental and social theories, but at the same time have not voted so heavily in favor of efficiency and machinery as has the United States, nor adopted capitalism so completely as have France and England, nor accepted communism to any large extent. While these nations are old in their culture, they are young as far as economic and political independence is concerned. Religiously, many are turning from Roman Catholicism, but relatively few are turning to Protestantism. Yet the thoughtful realize that their countries must soon be finding fundamental principles to guide them in solving their difficult questions. They cannot longer occupy the laissez-faire attitude and let happen what may. They cannot longer retain great illiterate classes, permit neglect of fundamental principles of public health, ignore the needs of the great mass of peasants and Indians, nor can they, above all, fail longer to emphasize both moral and social principles in government as well as in education.

Now it seems to me that if the Christian forces in North America that have spiritual messengers in Latin America would above all else help our southern neighbors in studying and solving these questions, they would be rendering the best kind of service in their power. I do not mean to emphasize what is known as a program of "social service." I am now

talking about a spiritual service above all else, a living with the people, in their universities and *colegios*, in their literary centers, in their clubs and coöperatives and workmen's unions, in friendship with poets and artists and newspaper editors, speaking in public and in private, undertaking now and then any piece of work that seemed necessary whether it be a spiritual retreat, a public lecture course, a piece of research or a sample social center in the slums. This kind of service would not need any new buildings or equipment, but would be simply sharing with the organizations already existing our help in finding the will of God in the ever-increasing perplexities of our economic, social and ecclesiastical tangle.

Such work is in fact already being done. The Committee on Coöperation in Latin America has fortunately secured Dr. George P. Howard to do some of it. After a year's special study in the United States he has just returned to South America. Recent reports of his lectures in the University of La Paz show how anxiously students and professors have followed his message. Dr. John Mackay, under the auspices of the Young Men's Christian Association, has been doing similar work for several years in South America and is now having important meetings in Mexico. A number of Latin American ministers are now undertaking work of this kind. Professor Erasmo Braga, Secretary of the Committee on Coöperation of the Protestant churches in Brazil, is one of the leading figures in the Rotary Club of Rio where social problems are continually faced. He has also had important influence in the National Educational Society, the Geographical Society of Brazil and other organizations that are studying the need of fundamental changes in their national and international outlook. Dr. Vicente Mendoza, of Mexico, recently gave a series of lectures in the Municipal Theatre in San Luis Potosi, with the mayor presiding, and the most distinguished people of the city were present. These conferences were permitted in

the Municipal Theatre with the understanding between the mayor and Dr. Mendoza that he would not discuss religion. For a week he lectured on the life of Christ and present world conditions and on the last Sunday he actually gave the invitation to any present that would signify their willingness to follow Christ. This was not considered religion, it was not a discussion of creeds or ecclesiasticism; it was only talking about life. This kind of work can be done in all kinds of places in all kinds of ways and it is imperative that those who believe in Christian values should develop more and more of these activities.

Besides the spoken word, the opportunity for giving a helpful message through the printed pages is enormous. Such countries as Mexico are teaching their people to read and write much more rapidly than they are providing them with the right kind of things to read. For the cultured classes in Latin America there is plenty to read, but it is too often of the worst pessimistic, mechanistic or neurotic type.

The monthly magazine, *La Nueva Democracia*, published by the Committee on Coöperation in Latin America, is, some believe, the most far-reaching work done by that committee. It circulates principally among the intellectual and governing classes in Latin America. During one week of last month the magazine received personal letters from presidents of three republics, enclosing subscriptions for the publication. The fundamental conviction running through its pages is that there is a Christian solution for each of the pressing problems facing the social, moral and spiritual world. It being the only publication in the Spanish language occupying the field of social progress and based on Christian modification, it has always unlimited opportunities of serving both applied science and Christianity.

It counts as members of its Advisory Board some of the most distinguished people in the Spanish-speaking world, in-

cluding Dr. Brum, former President of Uruguay; Señor Aaron Saenz, Minister of Labor in Mexico; Prof. Frederico de Onis, head of the Spanish Department of Columbia University; Señorita Gabriela Mistral, the Chilean poet; Dr. Antonio Sanchez de Bustamante, distinguished jurist of Cuba and member of the World Court; Dr. John A. Mackay, lecturer in Latin American universities, and Dr. Fernando de los Rios, Minister of Justice in the Spanish Republic.

The Carnegie Foundation last year sent several hundred copies of the magazine to various Latin American libraries; Mr. Dwight W. Morrow assisted in sending an annual subscription to a large number of teachers in the rural schools in Mexico and its articles are often copied by the leading dailies and magazines of Latin America. With other help like this the magazine could greatly enlarge its influence.

In advocating such work, to be done by North Americans or in any way aided by our Christian forces, we must frankly meet two objections. The first of these is that Latin America resents any kind of North American help. We must, of course, frankly admit that there is much misunderstanding and prejudice in Latin America concerning the Government and the people of the United States in the abstract. But the facts are that North American schools, North American hospitals, North American social centers, wherever established in Latin America are full to overflowing, and there is always an urge for more. The objection to such help comes only when it is given in a patronizing way with the foreigner assuming in any way superiority. Whenever Christian messengers go in the spirit of Christ with a deep appreciation of the fine things of Latin American life, with an endeavor to share instead of to direct, the welcome is usually beyond expectation. It ought to be frankly stated that where countries like Mexico, Ecuador and Venezuela have passed laws prohibiting the entrance of more foreign religious



workers, national officials have made it very clear that these laws have originated in the objection that the country had to the exploitation carried on by European Roman Catholic priests. The second objection often raised is that these countries are Roman Catholic and any messenger of the Protestant faith entering these lands is an unwelcomed proselytizer of other Christians. If this statement were ever true it could not possibly be maintained to-day in view of facts. In the first place, most of these countries have officially declared the separation of Church and State. In the second place, as already indicated, several of these countries have passed laws calculated to curb the activities of the Roman Catholic Church. In the third place, nearly all these countries, through important government officials or by distinguished groups of private citizens, have urged North American Evangelical churches to send representatives to Latin America. In the fourth place, it is well known that there are large liberal elements in these lands that have abandoned all organized religion. Some of these are frankly opposed to embracing any new religion, but others are earnest seekers for new spiritual life. The large numbers of theosophists, spiritualists and members of other cults that are found in the capital cities of these countries are evidence of a spiritual hunger which is determined to be satisfied by finding new religious inspiration. In the fifth place, both through the Protestant colonists who have gone to live in those lands and the preaching of Protestant missionaries, there has grown up an Evangelical church in countries like Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile and Cuba which is an important social element, completely directed by national leadership.

And finally it is impossible to keep any

kind of movement, economic, political or religious, from any part of the world to-day. Latin America is more and more feeling the intellectual currents of all the world. It is as foolish to think that a North American Monroe Doctrine might shut off these southern countries from European intercourse as to think that a European ecclesiastical power might shut them off from a free access to the spiritual currents from the outside. It is foolish for Protestants to think that Roman Catholics will not do all they can to make the United States Catholic. It is foolish to think that any religious movement to-day, if it is really in earnest, is not desirous of sharing its faith with every other part of the world. So it seems to me that if Protestants and Catholics are really interested in the triumphs of Christ in a world where sectarianism is threatening the very life of the Spirit, they ought to declare a moratorium on their attacks on each other and center their forces on the great enemy, materialism. Without speaking for anyone else except myself I am in profound agreement with the Chilean poet, Gabriela Mistral, who is an earnest Roman Catholic, when she says:

"The materialistic current in our countries is enormous. It counts as adepts the great majority of the educators of our youth. Our Church should remember its essential unity of interest with Protestantism and consider that it loses infinitely less when the free-thinker is evangelized than when the youth of Catholic blood embraces atheism with the furor of a Roman gladiator. Sooner or later, in an hour of travail, these two branches of the faith of Christ will come to understand that their fighting one another is the greatest misfortune for all the peoples of Spanish America."

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